GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
HOME AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:506
ANSWERED ON:21.10.2008
AMARNATH SHRINE BOARD DISPUTE
Chaudhary Shri Pankaj;Gangwar Shri Santosh Kumar;Paraste Shri Dalpat Singh;Patle Shri Shishupal Natthu;Shukla Smt. Karuna;Tripathi Shri Chandramani

Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of facts involving dispute regarding transfer of land to Amarnath Shrine Board;

(b) whether there were incidences of violence in reaction to this dispute:

(c) if so, the number of journalists/civilians/police personnels injured and killed in the said violence; and

(d) the steps taken by the Government to provide compensation to the injured and killed persons and to solve this dispute?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS(SHRI SRIPRAKASH JAISWAL)

(a) To (d): A Statement is enclosed.

STATEMENT IN REPLY TO PARTS (A) TO (D) OF LOK SABHA UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 506 FOR 21.10.2008

The State Government of Jammu and Kashmir, vide an order dated 26 May, 2008 approved the diversion of around 40 hectares (800 kanals) of forest land in Batal-Domail area for use by Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB) to raise temporary structures and facilities for Amarnath Yatris. The order of State Government led to misgivings and misperceptions about the true purport and import of the order, which were exploited by the separatist elements to propagate that the said order amounted to a permanent transfer of the land to the SASB with the intention of making permanent constructions and settling people thereon, and thus change the demographic profile in the Valley. All this led to widespread protests and agitation in the Kashmir Valley and consequent law and order problems and confrontation with the police.To resolve the controversy, the Governor (who is ex-officio-Chairman of the SASB) initiated the process of consultation with all the political parties and the State Government, with a view to exploring various options for the provision of facilities for the Amarnath Yatris. In the light of these discussions and consultations, the State Cabinet in its meeting held on 1st July, 2008 resolved to make all arrangements for the Yatra, except the religious aspects (which would be left to the SASB), through the Tourism Department, and decided to cancel the earlier order dated 26.05.08. The decision of the State Cabinet cancelling the order for diversion of land, led to series of protests and widespread agitation in the Jammu region, spearheaded by the Shri Amarnathji Yatra Sangharsh Samiti (SAYSS). The agitation led to bandhs and hartals, confrontations and clashes with police leading to loss of life and widespread damage to public and private property, imposition of curfew in various towns of the Jammu region, and disruption in the movement of goods and supplies to the Valley and outward movement of goods and products, particularly fruits from the Valley. While firm measures were taken by the Government to ensure free movement of goods and traffic on the Highway, the temporary obstructions over a few days were exploited by the separatist elements in the Valley to indulge in large scale propaganda, and protests against the alleged "economic blockage" of the Valley. This led to a renewal of the agitation and widespread protests in the Kashmir Valley and large scale mobilization of the people leading to confrontations and clashes with the law enforcement agencies, loss of life, damage to property, etc.

The Central Government called an All Party meeting in Delhi, which was followed by the visit of delegation of various parties to Jammu and Kashmir for discussions with different stakeholders, with the aim of developing a consensus for resolution of the issue. At the State Government level, the Governor, in order to resolve the controversy and diffuse the situation held meetings with the representatives of the Political Parties and also invited SAYSS for dialogue. Towards this end, he also set up a 4- member Committee led by an Adviser to hold talks with SAYSS. The talks led to an agreement on the issue on 30/31.8.08. As per the agreement, it was inter-alia, decided that the State Government shall set aside for the use by SASB, exclusively, the land in Baltal and Domail comprising an area of 800 kanals, traditionally under use for the annual Yatra purposes; the proprietary status/ownership/title of the land shall not undergo any change; and that the Board shall use the aforesaid land for the duration of the Yatra (including the period of making the required arrangements and winding up of the same). Consultations were also held in the matter with various other stakeholders. Following the agreement the agitation was called off.

As per the information made available by the State Government, 51 civilians died during the agitation in two provinces of Jammu and Kashmir. No Police personnel or Journalist died during the agitation. 1473 civilians, 333 Police/PMF personnel and 10 Pressmen were injured during the agitation. A Working Group has also been set up by the State Government to address all compensation relating issues relating both to Jammu and Kashmir Divisions.